

By 1stLt. C.M. Robertson, USMC

It was a bright, sunny, Southern California day, and I was the third copilot on a single-point, external-training flight in the Camp Pendleton Training Area. I looked forward to getting more stick time in the mighty Super Stallion. Our HAC's brief was thorough, and we waited for our hotseat time. I would ride in the belly with the second copilot until we arrived at the LZ, where the externals were to take place.

En route to our external site, we picked up the helicopter-support team (HST) at LZ-21. The LZ was a dirt football field and had numerous

obstructions, including power lines and football goal posts. With the HAC at the controls, the HST pickup went without a hitch.

We then headed to our external site, the DZ San Mateo. The second go and I were kicked out of the aircraft to wait our turns. After a couple hours, it finally was my turn. My single-point externals went without a hitch.

As we left the external site, to return the HST to the LZ, the HAC said he was raising the gear. I made a mental note of the gear as they went three up and locked. We flew southeast to Pulgas Canyon and water. As we turned south, along the coast, the HAC asked, "Can you handle the landing into the LZ?"

Being a motivated first lieutenant, I, of course, said, "Yes, I've got it, sir."

Turning downwind for the zone, the HAC reminded me, "Hit my approach numbers." Upon hearing this order, and knowing he earlier had the controls for this LZ, I knew he would be on me like a hawk.

I was on the numbers as I turned onto final from the 90.

The HAC reminded me to scan for the obstacles at the approach end. I leveled off to make it a steep approach, while keeping clear of the power lines and the goal posts. As we passed the power lines, the HAC asked the aircrewmembers

Two Landings

if we were clear. After the "all clear" call came from the back, the HAC reminded me to watch for the goal posts. Again, as we passed them, the HAC asked the aircrew if we were clear. After receiving the final "all clear" call, I continued my descent to a high hover in the LZ.

Soon, the aircraft began to wobble. The HAC took the controls, came up into a 10-foot hover, looked at the gear indicators, yelled an expletive, lowered the gear, and set down the aircraft. The HST got out, not knowing why we had made two landings.

We inspected the aircraft. The only damage was a broken radio antenna and bent metal on the underside around the antenna. The damage was minimal because we had not bottomed the collective, but the aircraft was down two weeks for planner and estimator repairs around the antenna.

This incident was a direct result of our fixation. Unfortunately, for us, the dummy alarm, also known as the gear-up-warning system, didn't work. We were too fixated on my approach and the obstacles in the zone to accomplish a simple task: call for the landing checks, and verify we had three down and locked on final. No one got hurt because of our mistake.

I now call for the landing checks (when I'm the PAC) or do them (when I'm the PNAC) well

before landing. Our squadron SOP states, “PAC will request a landing checklist prior to passing through 300 feet AGL or as appropriate. PNAC will perform landing checks prior to passing through 200 feet AGL.”

In regards to crew-resource management, try to recognize when you or other members of your crew are fixating, and notify everyone in the aircraft. 🦅

1stLt. Robertson flies with HMH-361.

This article articulates a CRM failure of the pilots in missing the landing checklist. I wonder what the crewchiefs were doing to miss this blatant gaffe. For an external flight, at least two aircrew probably were on ICS, clearing the aircraft into the LZ. Landing checks are completed over ICS so each crewman knows what’s going on. Although the pilots take the prize for tunnel vision on this incident, the crewchief or aircrew should have caught this omission.—Cdr. Chris Spain, H-53 analyst, Aircraft Operations Division, Naval Safety Center

for the Price of One Antenna

